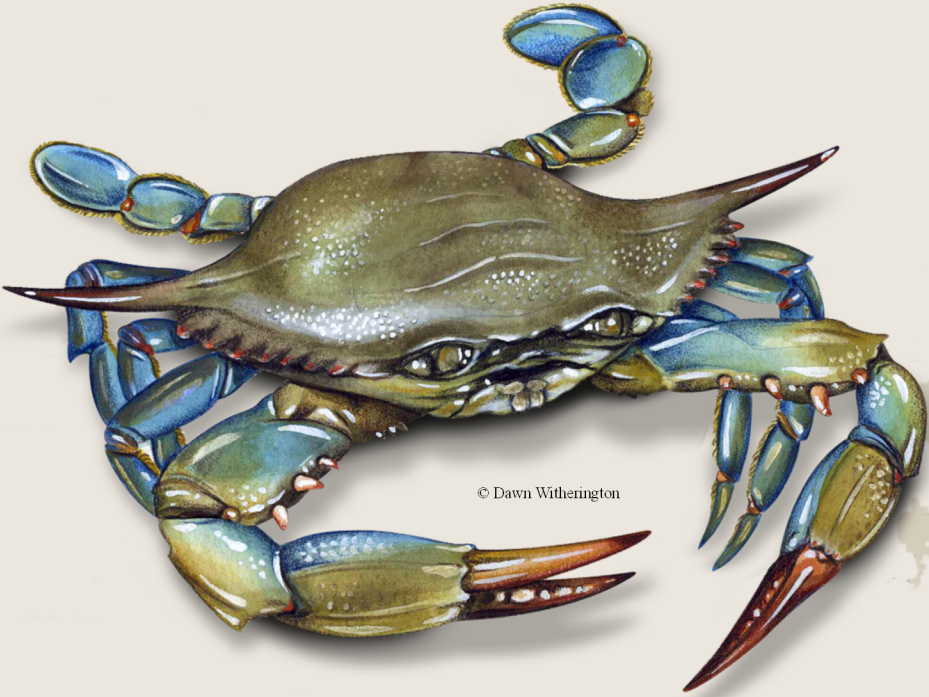




Blue crabs are fast growing marine crustaceans that are abundant along the North American coasts of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. They have pincer-like claws used for defense and to grasp and crush prey. Their last pair of legs is paddle-shaped, permitting them to swim more actively than most other crab species. Blue crabs are harvested year-round by Louisiana recreational and commercial fishermen; but catch numbers are highest in June, July, and August.



© Dawn Witherington



Blue Crab

(*Callinectes sapidus*)

Spawning Season

Female crabs mate immediately after molting while their shell is still soft. The male carries the female to protect her from predators until her shell hardens. Female crabs then migrate into higher salinity waters near beaches where spawning occurs. Females may produce over 2 million eggs at one time. As fertilized eggs begin to develop, they attach themselves to the underside of the female and form a large yellow egg mass. At this stage, the female is known as a “sponge” or “berry” crab.

Habitat

Blue crabs inhabit inland and coastal waters in Louisiana. Juveniles are often found in the vegetative habitats of upper estuaries. Adult blue crabs are widely distributed over a variety of bottom types in fresh, estuarine, and shallow oceanic waters. They have been found as far north as 190 miles upstream in the Atchafalaya River. Males can tolerate extremely low salinities and can be found in many tidally influenced freshwater lakes in Louisiana, while females prefer higher salinities in coastal lakes and bays.

Diet

Blue crab larval stages consume plankton, but transition to larger prey as they settle to the bottom. The diets of juvenile and adult blue crabs vary widely and include vegetative material, organic debris, bivalves, gastropods, insects, shrimp, other crustaceans, fish, and other blue crabs. They are highly cannibalistic, with some studies indicating that blue crabs make up as much as 13% of the diet in other blue crabs.

Age and Growth

Blue crabs grow rapidly and may reach harvestable size (five inches in carapace width) in as little as seven to eight months. Blue crabs grow through a process known as molting. When molting begins, crabs enter the “peeler” or “buster” stage. Hormone change triggers the breakdown of the old shell leading to the formation of a new shell that will harden within six to seven hours. Before the new shell has hardened, they are known as “soft-shell” crabs. Most blue crabs in the Gulf of Mexico live no longer than three years of age.



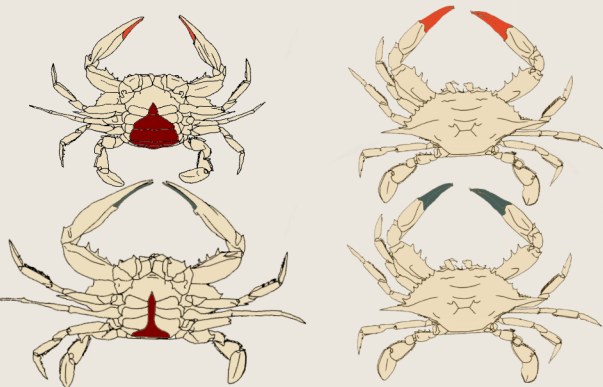
Your purchase of fishing equipment and motor boat fuels supports Sport Fish Restoration and boating access facilities.

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Identification



Top: Mature female blue crab with a rounded and dome shaped apron.

Bottom: Mature male blue crab with a long and narrow shaped apron.

Top: Female blue crab with red claw tips.

Bottom: Male blue crab with blue claw tips.

***Males grow to larger sizes than females.**

Blue Crab Quick Facts

The Latin translation of the scientific name *Callinectes sapidus* means “savory beautiful swimmer.”

Louisiana has the first and only Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified sustainable blue crab fishery in the world.

More than half of Louisiana blue crabs are harvested from the Pontchartrain and Terrebonne basins.

The maximum size (carapace width) for a blue crab is approximately 11 inches.

Louisiana leads all Gulf of Mexico states in blue crab landings and contributed 78%, or 43.7 million pounds, to the 2011 Gulf-wide total.

The Louisiana commercial blue crab fishery generates an economic impact of 293 million dollars and more than 3,000 jobs annually.

Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program

In 2004, the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program was initiated by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to address removal of derelict and abandoned crab traps. These traps increase ghost fishing mortality of blue crabs and other species captured incidentally, interfere with other commercial fishing gear types, create navigational hazards, and reduce visual appeal of the natural environment. Since its inception, this volunteer based program has removed and disposed of or recycled over 22,000 derelict crab traps.